

Honorable Chairman and Committee members,

My name is John Bakker. I am the manager of Michigan Asparagus Growers, Inc.

Approximately 150 Michigan family farms produce 20 million lbs of asparagus annually with a farm-gate value of \$16,000,000. That is nearly ½ billion spears that are hand snapped, almost exclusively by migrant farm workers, each year!

Michigan asparagus farmers are extremely concerned about any State or Federally mandated E-verify legislation that is not accompanied by a workable "Guest worker" program. This concern is well justified as this past spring, May 2011, Michigan asparagus growers mowed off or abandoned 1 million lbs of perfectly good asparagus due to the lack of workers. This worker shortage caught Michigan farmers completely off guard and resulted in a good deal of questioning as to what had gone wrong.

The vast majority of migrant workers that harvest asparagus come north each spring from either Texas or Florida where they reside and winter. What became apparent this past spring was that the "normal" workforce arrived from Texas but reduced numbers came up from Florida. Growers that were able to contact some of their prior Florida workforce learned that they were worried about traveling through Alabama or Georgia, both states which had pending E-verify legislation.

Let me emphasize that point. In late April when Florida workers were contemplating coming north, neither Georgia nor Alabama had yet signed E-verify legislation into law (GA-5/13/11, AL-6/10/11) but the strong likelihood that both states would be "unfriendly" places to travel through on their way home kept the workers in place. Neither of the two proposed Michigan E-verify bills directly affects farm workers, yet if these bills become law, Michigan, like Georgia and Alabama will be perceived as an "unfriendly" place to travel to and work. The effect on Michigan specialty crop agriculture will be the same as if agricultural workers were singled out.

Let's look quickly at Georgia's labor intensive agriculture in 2011. Although a full accounting of the losses suffered by farmers, packers, processors, shippers and rural communities is not complete, preliminary estimates indicate a farm worker shortage of 11,000 workers and crop losses of \$300 million plus.

Presently House Judiciary Committee chairman Lamar Smith (R-Texas) has introduced legislation that would require all U.S. employers to use a federal E-verify system. I would beg of you, at the very least, to delay any further action on state legislation until the outcome of the Smith legislation is known. Please do not single out Michigan as another state where migrant workers feel threatened or unwelcome. Please do not choke one of Michigan's true economic "shining stars", agriculture, by threatening its lifeblood – migrant workers.

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